

# English Language Learner Status In A Predominantly European-American School


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## ABSTRACT

*Using status characteristics theory, this study examined a sixth-grade Korean student's experiences associated with English literacy learning while attending a predominantly European-American school in the United States. Of particular interest was the interaction between race, culture, and learning in a classroom where the mainstream teachers, students, and the English language learner experienced poor communication and unequal social relationships when addressing academic and literacy tasks. The study's findings suggest that the teacher's perceptions of and inexperience with culturally and racially different students contributed to the classroom social dynamics, thereby influencing the English language learner's class interactions and participation in literacy activities. This study provides critical insight for educators regarding the importance of social acceptance and equal status in a teaching and learning relationship in the mainstream classroom with English language learners.*

**Keywords:** ELLs, Classroom interactions, Social status, Race, Teacher pedagogy, Literacy learning

## INTRODUCTION

 ver the past few decades, research has shown that English language learners (ELLs) and students of color perform differently in academic and literacy achievement; and research correlates this disparate performance with race, gender, and class as a contributing factor (Christian & Bloome, 2004; Compton-Lily, 2007; Heath, 1983; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Philips, 1983; Rist, 1970/2000; Zirkel, 2004). Research suggests that these students' struggles are not the result of an individual's cognitive deficit, but the problems are socially generated within the context of school curriculum and relationships (Christian & Bloome, 2004; Cummins, 1994, 2001a; Lew, 2006; Triplett, 2007; Yoon, 2007, 2008). Researchers (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 2000; Nasir & Hand, 2006; Nuthall, 2004) assert that additional investigation is needed to more fully describe how an individual student's school success is impacted by the social interactions and pedagogical relations that mainstream teachers create as they develop classroom learning environments.

At the present time, there is a lack of documented research in the way diverse students' ethnicity and culture interact with the mainstream teachers and students (August & Shanahan, 2006; Yoon, 2008). For this reason, there is a call for more research to understand the complex interplay between dominant and non-dominant norms and cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and racial intersections among mainstream teachers, traditional students, and students of color. By understanding ELLs' academic needs in the mainstream classroom, teachers can help ELLs learn English language/literacy skills. Knowing more about their social needs, they can promote positive social relations in the classroom, thus teachers can better advocate for equity education for ELLs and students of color (Compton-Lily, 2007; Cummins, 2001a; Denzin, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Zacher, 2007). The purpose of this manuscript directly addresses this challenge through the study of an ELL; a Korean student's struggle with academic and literacy learning as he interacted with his European-American teacher and mainstream classroom peers. Although this is one case study of an ELL, examples of this student's experiences can inform teachers about the kinds of struggles ELLs may have when the language, ethnicity, culture, and race of the student is different from his/her own. In this way, teachers can apply some knowledge gained from this study to other similar situations involving struggling immigrant and language minority students. In the next section, relevant research regarding ELLs and students of color is provided, then the conceptual framework of the study is addressed by discussing status characteristics theory, followed with a discussion of the methods employed and the context of this study.

## **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

### **Research on Students of Color and ELLs**

Research related to cultural, ethnic, and racial factors influencing ELLs' and students of colors' self-identity, social relations, and academic performance contribute to our understandings regarding these students' academic and social needs (Lew, 2006; Marinari, 2005; Palmer, 2007; Yoon, 2007, 2008; Zirkel, 2004). While differences in culture and race play critical roles in the divisions among the majority teacher, peers, and their students of color, researchers assert that these differences actually result from power imbalances and their resulting social relationships formed in and out of the classroom (Lew, 2006; Nasir & Hand, 2006; Rist 1970/2000; Zirkel, 2004). In particular, a recent burgeoning of diverse student populations in classrooms across the United States has led to research that points out how the teacher's role, pedagogy, and his/her views about students of color can greatly influence students' social status, relationships, and class participation (Christian & Bloome, 2004; McCarthey, 1997; Yoon, 2007, 2008; Zirkel, 2004), and ultimately their academic performance (Christian & Bloome, 2004; Compton-Lily, 2007; Rist, 1970/2000; Zirkel, 2004).

The common theme linking these studies is the observation of a cultural, linguistic, and racial barrier between the teachers and ELLs and students of color. According to Philips (1983), there exists, "mutual non-comprehension" (p. 196) between the mainstream teacher and the students of color. That is, there is mismatch between school and home cultures and languages. Without much background understanding of the ELLs and students of color, teachers often pay little attention to these students' sociocultural and academic needs in their curricular content, procedures, social dynamics, and interactions in the classroom (Christian & Bloome, 2004; Compton-Lily, 2007; Heath, 1983; McCarthey, 1997; Philips, 1983; Triplett, 2007; Yoon, 2008). ELLs and students of color, and their parents may not always understand their rights, classroom procedures, and socially appropriate practices of the school (Brooker, 2002; Compton-Lily, 2007; Valdez, 1996). As it is demonstrated within this literature, it is always the students of color who are required to subtract their language and culture in order to assimilate to the mainstream classroom due to the virtue of authority and hierarchy existing in the classroom (Philips, 1983). In such a classroom climate, the ELLs and students of color often experience limited participation and low social status compared to their mainstream peers and they may not easily form positive social relationships with their teachers and peers. Their social networks and friendship connections become narrower so that they do not always get needed help to optimally use academic and social resources, thereby unsuccessfully performing academic tasks and negating career options for present and future purposes (Lew, 2006). Ultimately, the mutual non-understanding between mainstream teachers, peers and ELLs and students of color lead not only to narrow social networks and relationships but to disparate academic achievement (Lew, 2006; Philips, 1983; Zirkel, 2004).

At the present time, research in the area of ethnic and racial interactions between mainstream classroom teachers and ELLs and students of color is extremely limited, particularly when addressing the impact on students' social positioning, class participation, and academic literacy performance (August & Shanahan, 2006). In the interest of extending this area of research, this study explores a Korean student's academic literacy learning experiences as demonstrated through the pedagogical and social relationships in the mainstream classroom. The following questions are considered: 1) In what ways did the classroom social forces and pedagogical relations hindered or supported Hyun-woo's (pseudonym) participation and social status?; and 2) what is Hyun-woo's and his home reactions to the mainstream classroom dynamics?

### **Conceptual Framework**

I draw on the status characteristics theory (Berger, Fisek, Norman, & Zelditch, 1977; Berger, Rosenholtz, & Zelditch, 1980; Cohen, 1982) to interpret the classroom data. The theory of status characteristics can be explained and defined by its attention to power-prestige order arising out of problem-solving social group situations (Berger, Fisek, Norman, & Zelditch, 1977; Berger, Rosenholtz, & Zelditch, 1980; Burke, Stets, & Cerven, 2007; Cohen, 1982). Berger et al. (1977, 1980) explain that race, sex, ethnicity, and physical attractiveness are diffuse (as opposed to specific) status characteristics. That is, unlike specific status characteristics, diffuse status characteristics are not related to a specific task or task performance; individuals of high status (i.e., those who have high status outside the group situations) are considered competent (Berger et al., 1980; Cohen, 1982). Cohen (1982) and Burke, Stets, and

Cerven (2007) demonstrated in their research that the high-status students (e.g., White students as opposed to students of color in problem-solving settings) determine more initiation of interactions, exhibit more leadership roles, participate more, call for more attention from and exert more influences on others, and receive higher evaluations from the members of the group. Once high or low evaluations are formed, the members behave accordingly; that is, they validate their expectations and associate expectations with one's competence in subsequent group work situations.

For this study, ELL status, ethnicity, and race can be diffuse status characteristics if the teacher does the following: a) European-American students' and students of color academic performances are differentially evaluated; b) European-American students are assumed to know more English literacy knowledge and other subject areas than students of color, so that distinct sets of specific expectations are placed on students of color and European-American students. In subsequent activities, the teacher often forms expectations and confirms his/her views—ELLs or students of color are lacking motivation, appropriate language and culture, being lazy, (Larson, 2003) or having processing problems (Cummins, 1994). Without understanding these students' sociocultural background, the teacher uses exclusively mainstream content and processes and confirms previous expectations and evaluates these students' low participation or performance and treats them accordingly (Brooker, 2002; Compton-Lily, 2007; Triplett, 2007). For example, the teacher neither calls on these students to express their ideas nor expects them to answer the teacher's questions, nor does the teacher designate them as classroom leaders (Christian & Bloome, 2004; Yoon, 2007); c) European-American students are assumed to be more intelligent than students of color. This way, teachers often associate the ELL status (and ethnicity/race) with beliefs that ELLs and students of color have low intelligence and are low functioning readers/writers/learners (Christian & Bloome, 2004). That is, these students are positioned as having lower social status in the classroom. The inadvertent consequence of this dynamic is that the teacher's behaviors are followed and corroborated by student peers: they mimic the teacher's treatment of ELLs and students of color (Christian & Bloome, 2004; Yoon, 2007, 2008). Research has studied and documented ELLs' (and their ethnicity/race) low status—and suggests that these diffuse status characteristics adversely affect the social dynamics which influenced ELLs' lower social status, peripheral participation and narrow social relationships in the classroom (e.g., Christian and Bloome, 2004; Cohen, 1982; Gutierrez & Larson, 1994; Rist, 1970/2000; Yoon, 2007, 2008) and lower academic performance (Zirkel, 2004).

A significant aspect of the literature describing inter-group relations research and status characteristics theory, is the core concept that learning can occur only when all participants' relationships have mutual understanding of one another's academic, emotional, and social needs (DiPardo & Potter, 2003; Panofsky, 2003; Wells & Claxton, 2002). Moreover, the important findings from inter-group research made it clear that only when *all* participants have equal social status, all students including students of color can reap the benefits that diversity brings to academic settings (Antonio, 2002; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado & Gurin, 2002; Hurtado, 2006; Jayakuamar, 2009). Only then, can mainstream students gain diverse perspectives and critical awareness toward multicultural competence (Gurin et al, 2002; Hurtado, 2006; Jayakuamar, 2009). And only then, ELLs and students of color are enabled to incorporate their background knowledge when learning new language and culture (Cummins, 1994, 2001).

Status characteristics theory can help unveil the tacit or unspoken status characteristics consistent with ELL status and cultural, ethnic, and racial background functioning in the classroom, especially when the teacher's expectations of the ELLs and students of color originates from deficit and subtractive views. Deficit and subtractive views mean that ELLs' native language and culture is devalued and they are implicitly required to assimilate to the dominant norms (Lambert, 1974). Again, the unintended consequence of the teacher's expectations and evaluations may result in the ELLs' or students of color's academic and social lives—and as a result, their participation, social status, and academic functioning and experiences in the classrooms may be at risk.

## **CONTEXT AND METHODS**

### **The Setting: Korean Student Participant, and the Teachers**

Hyun-woo (all persons' and place names are pseudonyms) was a 12-year-old, mainstreamed 6th grade boy enrolled in Bryant Elementary School. Hyun-woo remained quiet during literacy periods but was active during Math

and playful with his friends during non-academic opportunities. Hyun-woo had been born in Hawaii at which time the family moved back to Korea. The family immigrated back to the United States when Hyun-woo was 6 years old and had completed half of his first grade. Hyun-woo was initially enrolled in a public school where he attended ESL pull-out programs during the mornings and returned to his regular classroom for the rest of the day. This schedule continued from grades 1 to 2. Upon successful completion of applicable ESL testing, Hyun-woo was admitted at Bryant school in grade 3. By the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, he had fluent communication skills as defined by Cummins (BICS, basic interpersonal communicative skills, Cummins, 1979). Hyun-woo's parents were fluent in communicative skills but not well equipped with English literacy skills to assist their children with English Language Arts, Reading, and Writing homework.

Hyun-woo's teacher, Mr. Clark, was in his late 50s and is European-American. Mr. Clark had 12 years of teaching career at Bryant and known as the "excellent writing teacher" among parents. Mr. Clark had a master's degree in literacy education. In Hyun-woo's classroom, Hyun-woo was the only Asian among 28 European-American upper-or-middle class students.

Hyun-woo attended Bryant, which is known as an elite school and is consisted of predominantly European-American students. At the time of this study, the school had an enrollment of 537 total students: 488 European Americans (90.9%), 24 Asian/Pacific Islanders (4.5%), 17 Hispanics (3.2%), and 6 African Americans (1.1%). Ten students were eligible for free/reduced lunch (1.9%). Although there were 8,591 English Language Learners (ELLs) in the district, there were no limited English proficient (LEP) students in Bryant school (2004-2005 School Accountability Report).

### **The Process of Data Collection and Analysis**

As a qualitative researcher, I collected data at Bryant school. At the time of my data collection, I worked as an ESL teacher in a school district in the U.S. Northwest. I contacted the ESL office in the district and they helped locate a few Korean students. I was able to work with Mr. Clark and Hyun-woo at Bryant. I visited the classroom three to four times a week and each time two to three hours for an entire semester. Mr. Clark had 90 minute uninterrupted literacy block and I observed the classroom interactions mostly during this literacy block and other content areas (e.g., Math). I had arranged four 45 minute formal and several informal interviews with Mr. Clark. With Hyun-woo, I had informal eight interviews ranging one to two hours. I tutored Hyun-woo at home because Hyun-woo's mother requested that I do not draw attention to Hyun-woo at school because Hyun-woo was sensitive about being an only non-White student. Therefore, I interacted with him at home reviewing the same writing lessons that Mr. Clark taught in class. During these home tutoring sessions, I had numerous conversations with Hyun-woo's mother regarding his classroom learning and social incidents at school. Because we share Korean language and culture, I had advantage to work with Hyun-woo and his parents, especially closely with his mother.

I also collected the teacher's lesson plans and Hyun-woo's and his peers' writing samples to triangulate different data in relation to the teaching approaches and its impact on learning on student of color. I compared Hyun-woo's writing samples to the mainstream peers after the teacher's literacy instructions, his friends' scaffolding, and after my tutoring. This comparison helped me discern my quest for this study—did Hyun-woo's classroom participation and learning depend on the teaching methods, equal status, and relationships set up in the classroom? All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. I also took field notes around the corner of the classroom where I could easily observe the whole-class and small class interactions. I focused on the teacher's interactions with Hyun-woo and all other students and peer interactions with him so that I could better capture the interaction patterns among them. I audiotaped all classroom instructions and used them to cross check with my field notes daily.

Data analysis was ongoing throughout the data collection period. I used thematic analysis to identify themes related to the research questions in the field notes and interview transcripts (Bogdan & Bicklin, 1998; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Stringer, 2004). I attempted to examine four areas of classroom and home teaching/learning practices and social relationships in relation to answer the research questions: 1) the teacher's pedagogical approaches and Hyun-woo's reactions to them; 2) interviews with Mr. Clark to understand his perceptions of ELLs in general and Hyun-woo; 3) the mainstream peers' interactions with Hyun-woo in whole-class and small group interactions; and 4) Hyun-woo's and home reactions to the classroom practices.

I constantly compared and analyzed the observation data of Hyun-woo's classroom participation and interactions with interview data. When the interview data matched with my observation data, I added them as categories to the study. For example, when Hyun-woo behaved confidently by raising hand and interacting with peers in class whole-class and small group interactions during Math periods, I analyzed his behavior and learning as positive and confident, when he was quiet and working alone especially during literacy periods, I analyzed his behavior as passive and excluded from the group. I discerned when he was confident or confused and why he was so during interviews when he said, "I don't know what the teacher asked me to do. I was confused about the words, similes and metaphors" or "When my friends tell me specific things, I understand."

Based on the patterns identified in my classroom observation data and interviews, themes emerged and I conceptually labeled them as: "The teacher's views and perception of the ELLs or students of color," "The teacher's classroom practices and interactions: Oblivious to the ELL/student of color's needs," and "Hyun-woo: Quiet and passive student of color in the predominantly White classroom."

## **RESULTS**

In this section, I provide data that address the three main themes: a) the teacher's views and perception of the ELLs or students of color; b) The teacher's classroom practices and interactions: Oblivious to the ELL/student of color's needs; and c) Hyun-woo's and home relations: Quiet and passive student of color in the predominantly White classroom. The main purpose of this section is to illustrate the teacher's pedagogical practices and classroom dynamics among the teacher, peers, and Hyun-woo as well as Hyun-woo's home reactions to the classroom events and incidents. In so doing, I consider how social status and relationships are perceived by the mainstream participants in this learning environment and the kind of social status is assigned to Hyun-woo.

### **The Teacher's Views and Perceptions of ELLs and Students of Color**

Mr. Clark shared his views with me during interviews about his teaching approaches and understandings of ELLs and students of color. His teaching approaches were tailored for the mainstream students and did not provide differentiated instruction, saying, "At this school, ESL is not something I have to deal with...I am just going to be doing basic review of the core writing programs and basic grammar and remind them what they already know." In another interview with me, Mr. Clark described his beliefs and values regarding Hyun-woo's performance and behaviors in the following language:

*I consider kids earned my trust and respect when they first come into my classroom. If the kids want to get in to Mr. C's privileged club... those kids are the ones who get their homework done...Hyun-woo is not part of that group. He hasn't learned that way and hasn't earned that way. He is not even coping with just getting the homework done right... He was just distracting other people...I think that he has learning disability or language problems.*

His instruction and teaching practices reflected this belief. Most of the literacy lessons, Mr. Clark presented materials orally in whole-class format, telling students what the terms mean. Sometimes he used the overhead projector to explain the key points. The whole-class format was usually followed by small group peer-led reading/writing/revising discussions. In these formats, I observed that Hyun-woo was quiet, working alone, and no one in his group asked him questions to include him unless everyone had to share ideas in their groups. During these times, Hyun-woo avoided eye contact with me and turned his face away from me in general. Remembering what his mother told me about his cultural identity struggle, in one interview I talked with Mr. Clark about Hyun-woo's mother's concern of his identity struggle, Mr. Clark was adamant that those cultural and racial concerns delved into an area beyond his responsibility stating, "That's something I cannot cross . . . It's not my place to cross that boundary as a teacher . . . That's NOT [emphasis added] in my job description." Mr. Clark continued:

*There is no diversity in this school. This is the toughest, hardest place for him to be. In this school, there is no diversity. These kids don't understand what diversity is and probably 99% of this school staff and students never dealt with a person of color. I can only think of one student that I've ever had from Russia. This is White mainstream...it's a very closed community. Here, these people won't let you in just because you are a White person in that. So, you got to earn yourself to be in the club and if you're a second language and very limited English speaker, they do not let you in their group. These kids are a lot like that way, too.*

Mr. Clark did not believe that it was in his job description to accommodate ELL/student of color's academic and social needs in this school. This school was for the White mainstream students and people and thus it was a wrong placement for the culturally, linguistically, and racially different student population. With this conviction, he did not modify any pedagogical practices and social interactions with Hyun-woo, his only Asian-American, non-White student in his classroom.

### **The Teacher's Classroom Practices and Interactions: Oblivious to the ELL/student of Color's Needs**

Like the "White people and kids in the club," Mr. Clark did not include ELLs and students of color to accommodate their needs academically and socially. Typically, Hyun-woo sat quietly without interacting much with anyone in the classroom during literacy periods. Mr. Clark provided numerous reading/writing instructions using whole-class and small group formats. His 90 minute literacy block usually started with whole-group lecture or presentations followed by small group activities. Mr. Clark called on mainstream students and interacted with them and did not call on Hyun-woo nor interact with him unless Hyun-woo approached him first. In the whole-group format, Hyun-woo did not raise hand to answer or ask questions. Mr. Clark usually started his literacy block in whole-class presenting his key points about literacy terms, grammar, or writing for specific genre directions. For the entire semester, the teacher purposely progressed teaching students from a word to phrase, to sentence structure, and to finally paragraph/multi paragraph comprehension and writing. For example, when Mr. Clark taught similes and metaphors at the beginning of the semester, he orally reviewed simile as "comparing two really different things" and asked the students what words they use to make comparisons. Many students raised their hands, Hyun-woo did not raise his hand and sat quietly. Reiterating what one student answered, the teacher told the students to use "like" or "as" in sentences.

In a subsequent metaphor lesson, the teacher gave similar oral instruction, saying, "Say, ah, my teacher was like a superman. If I take out 'like,' it is a metaphor. Look through your teacher simile sentences again and change the sentences and wording a little bit to see if you can change them to metaphors. You can't use 'like' or 'as.'" After this whole-class direction, Hyun-woo was working with the same group of five European-American peers. Peers talked, laughed, discussed, and negotiated how to change the simile sentences into metaphors excluding Hyun-woo. Mr. Clark circulated the class and listened in. When he came to Hyun-woo's group, he faced and interacted with Ashley, Laura, and two other mainstream peers. He did not face Hyun-woo or interacted with him.

*Mr. Clark:* Ok, you are comparing something to something else. Is every sentence all a metaphor or a simile? "I jumped off the bridge" is not a simile because it does not have like or as. But is that a metaphor?

*Laurie and peers:* Yeah!

*Ashley:* No.

*Hyun-woo:* (Looked at the teacher but did not answer)

*Mr. Clark:* Why not, Ashley?

*Ashley:* Not comparing.

*Mr. Clark:* Exactly...if it is a metaphor, you gotta be comparing something to something else. (Left for another group)

While Mr. Clark and the mainstream peers interacted with one another, Hyun-woo looked at the teacher, looked at his sentences, worksheets, but did not say a word and just sat quietly for that 10-15 minute small group discussion. As I checked his simile and metaphor worksheets and writing, Hyun-woo did not change simile to metaphor sentences, nor did he complete the work sheet correctly. In an interview with Mr. Clark, I asked whether he looked at Hyun-woo's writing simile and metaphor sentences, he told me that he did not have the time to look at them.

Approximately in the middle of the semester, Mr. Clark moved on to teach a paragraph writing a different genre, descriptive writing—describing about hamburger. On the first day of descriptive writing whole-class presentation, Mr. Clark told the students to close their eyes and imagine a perfect or imperfect hamburger for a few minutes. Then, the students were to brainstorm all the words that came to their mind and put them down on the lined paper. Students were called on to share their brainstorming list. Students raised hands to share their lists, but Hyun-woo did not. Mr. Clark called on some students to share their lists, students read their lists, “pickles, tomatoes, mouth watering, juicy, heavenly...” What Hyun-woo wrote (“stale, oily, dead cow, fattening..”) was not shared. However, Mr. Clark called on Hyun-woo to give him warnings for chuckling loudly or mumbling something to himself or to the peer. The teacher then interacted with Hyun-woo, “Hyun-woo, that does not help. This is your second warning!” After lunch, the teacher took the students to the computer lab to help students use the “Inspiration” computer program to make the list into the bubble brainstorm form. Students including Hyun-woo converted their lists into the bubble forms.

The next day, Mr. Clark continued the hamburger descriptive writing lesson with the overhead directions. Before reading the overhead directions, the teacher asked students to get out the brainstorm sheet from yesterday. Everyone took it out of their desks except Hyun-woo. Hyun-woo appeared alarmed, he whispered to his peer, “What?...what sheet out?” his peer said, “the brainstorm, the bubble thing!” Then, Hyun-woo took it out and listened to the teacher’s 20 minute whole-class lecture about writing a descriptive paragraph. Mr. Clark directed students to describe a perfect or imperfect hamburger, orally reviewing terms such as brainstorm, descriptive paragraph, and conclusion:

*Mr. Clark:* Now we are writing a descriptive paragraph to describe a perfect or imperfect hamburger....Topic sentence is generally the first sentence, to catch reader’s attention. Who are you waiting for? Don’t say me.

*Amy:* Readers?

*Mr. Clark:* Yes... we are writing for the audience. This is what I am specifically looking for...Your next 3-6 sentences, use showing sentences, showy language, using one simile and one compound sentence...[and] \$100.00 vocabulary words—two words that are really bang-up words and wonderful strong vocabulary...then for a paragraph to be good, complete, you need some sort of concluding sentence, restate what you were starting with. The key to do this is to keep describing your hamburger. Now I need you to describe for the next 20 minutes. A paragraph must be really focused.

Following this whole-class presentation, students were asked to individually write their descriptive paragraph about hamburger. Then students were asked to share their paragraphs to the whole class. Some mainstream students (e.g., Mark, Mary Kay, Carl, Rachel, and Lynn) were called on to share their writings, they used their brainstorm words and phrases, “juicy,” “mouth watering,” “smelled like heaven,” and “pickles,” and read aloud their paragraphs. However, Hyun-woo wrote fantasy stories, did not use any of his brainstormed words, and never had an opportunity to share his ideas or writing with the rest of the class. In an interview, I asked why Mr. Clark did not call on him during literacy events, he told me that:

*When somebody gets picked, they answer and we move on. Hyun-woo, the first thing that comes out of his mouth is usually kind of jeeverish sort of statement, that’s why kids giggle and laugh about. I don’t think that they quite understand that Hyun-woo is struggling with this. That’s kind of why everyone laughs at whatever Hyun-woo does...At some point, I am almost hoping that Hyun-woo is sick one day, then I can talk to the class about how we should properly deal with Hyun-woo ’s, you know, struggles.*

Mr. Clark did not understand the subtle needs of Hyun-woo to be included as a full member of the classroom. Hyun-woo needed small group academic scaffolding from a teacher who understands the students’ weaknesses and strengths and modify the whole-class instruction to meet the needs of the struggles of students of color. But the teacher had not looked at his paper and he did not understand Hyun-woo’s confusion with the academic literacy concepts and genre understanding.

As Mr. Clark mentioned in the interview above, many mainstream peers laughed at Hyun-woo's statements or questions a number of times I observed during literacy periods. The next example shows an exchange Hyun-woo had with his peers (Ashley, Bridgette, Laurie, and Danny) during the lesson in which he asked the meaning of the term "conclusion":

*Ashley:* Is mine [writing] exciting? Do I have a satisfying conclusion?

*Bridgette:* Do I have a satisfying conclusion?

*Peers:* Yes!

*Hyun-woo:* What's a conclusion? (as Hyun-woo said this, 3 other peers giggled)

*Danny:* It is the end of the story.

*Hyun-woo:* Okay, I get it.

Ashley, Bridgette, and Danny in Hyun-woo's group knew what a conclusion was. As with the earlier brainstorm and other literacy-term examples, Hyun-woo did not know what the terms "meant how they are used in sentences and paragraphs" (quoting Hyun-woo's words during informal interviews with me). The small group interactions mentioned above—revising students' "conclusion" in their paragraphs—illustrated how Hyun-woo's confusion with the term, "conclusion" and usage of it was quickly turned into an embarrassment for him as his group mates giggled and laughed at his statement. Hyun-woo said, "Ok, I get it" to avoid further embarrassment rather than learning what it meant. However, I found that Hyun-woo was confused conclusion with summary during at home interview and tutoring. Mr. Clark did not foster a supportive environment where students of color are encouraged to feel free to express their ideas in an equal social-status classroom climate.

Mr. Clark's verbal presentations and reviews may have been appropriate for the mainstream students in this high-achieving school as stated by him, "because of the kind of clientele we have here." Not surprisingly, a student like Hyun-woo would not have the background, education and parent's English literacy, and home environment to quickly grasp and adequately understand the meanings of these academic and literacy terms without differentiated small group instructions. Similarly, the correct usage and application in written assignments would remain elusive.

From the middle of October through the end of the semester, Hyun-woo was in Time-out desks (what Mr. Clark called, "Dog House" he rarely disciplined students this way, but Hyun-woo was), became a garbage collector outside during lunch breaks, and lost field trip privilege. By saying the above statement, Mr. Clark acknowledged that Hyun-woo had not met his expectations. When Hyun-woo did not finish work correctly or on time, Mr. Clark automatically defaulted to low evaluations of Hyun-woo rather than reflecting on his classroom practices. The result was a confirmation of the teacher's expectation that Hyun-woo lacked intellectual capacity ("he needs to be referred to special education") or "being lazy." As Mr. Clark enumerated to me, "Hyun-woo has not learned that way and has not earned that way—European American mainstream" to be included in Mr. good kids club called as discussed earlier, "Mr. C's club."

The status characteristic in this case can be explained in four ways: First, the teacher's expectation was confirmed in that as a second language speaker, Hyun-woo performed poorly than his European-American peers. Given group work, he anticipated that Hyun-woo's work would be "sloppy and poorly done" compared to his peers and group mates. Here the teacher evaluated Hyun-woo's performance based on Hyun-woo's non-understanding of the English literacy terms, genres, and culturally appropriate behaviors in the classroom (e.g., not being able to comprehend and writing according to the teacher's instruction, thereby turning in work incorrectly, or not interacting with peers appropriately or "just disturbing them" during individual work time). Also, this evaluation was more in line with the teacher's cultural assumptions, "if you're a second language and very limited English speaker, they do not let you in their group." Hyun-woo was excluded from many literacy events and activities.



Secondly, once the teacher confirmed his poor evaluation of Hyun-woo's work when Hyun-woo's works were done incorrectly, he formed distinct sets of expectations of Hyun-woo's performance: "Hyun-woo may have processing, learning disability, and language problems or he is lazy." The teacher then behaved according to his expectations: He routinely and almost exclusively called on and interacted with the European-American peers and seldom approached Hyun-woo. Hyun-woo was not included in "Mr. C's club" because he was "not even coping with homework...because he hasn't learned that way and earned that way." Hyun-woo was called mostly for warnings and reprimands.

On the same token, Hyun-woo's peers perceived his low social status, the teacher's treatment of him, and his passive and puzzled behaviors as possessing lower symbolic status—ELL status. Peers giggled and laughed at his comments and questions. This way, Mr. Clark's lower expectations and evaluation of Hyun-woo were socially validated by the peers and other school personnel (interviews with librarian). Hyun-woo's confusion with literacy terms and genre understanding and low social status appeared to lead him to much less positive interactions with the teacher and peers. Hyun-woo did not interact much and was silenced during literacy events. These classroom practices may have contributed to Hyun-woo's further confusion with literacy terms rather than understanding them correctly from classroom interactions and led to limited participation and poor literacy performance.

Thirdly, the teacher's views of Hyun-woo started out with cultural assumptions—deficit views—combined with undifferentiated instruction and no feedback; His evaluation was not specifically associated with Hyun-woo's literacy task performance ability which is related to logical capability to grasp the literacy instructions. Hyun-woo was capable to perform as readers can tell by reading his fantasy story writing. When literacy tasks are given to him with specific scaffolding and differentiated instructions, Hyun-woo was able to write texts according to the teacher's instruction: I found him to perform well when I compared his writing and comprehension when there were positive relationships and equal status established among peers. Also I observed that he wrote properly to the teacher's instruction when I tutored him at home with specific and explicit scaffolding. From these supportive peer interactions and my home tutoring, the texts Hyun-woo wrote followed the teacher's instructions. In this case, it can be argued that the teacher's poor evaluation of Hyun-woo had to do with his deficit views and cultural assumptions, his pedagogical approaches, and social relationships created in the classroom climate and not due to Hyun-woo's intellectual capability.

Hyun-woo's struggles were induced within the classroom pedagogical and social relationships. In so drawing this conclusion, I argue that the status characteristics theory can support the analysis of the data. That is, the lower functioning reader/writer evaluation was more or less driven from the deficit and cultural assumptions the teacher conceived of him and the classroom pedagogical and social relations practiced by the teacher. This lower evaluation did not specifically originate from Hyun-woo's cognitive inability. It can be said that the teacher's subsequent adherence to his evaluation was based on diffuse status characteristics such as culture, ethnicity, language, and racial background rather than Hyun-woo's intellectual deficit. This way, the status characteristics theory helps to explain that the teacher's low expectations and treatment of Hyun-woo inadvertently confirmed his low social status and silence in the classroom during literacy events.

### **Hyun-woo's and Home Reactions: Quiet and Passive Student of Color in the Predominantly White Classroom**

During home interviews and tutoring sessions, Hyun-woo's mother often sat with us to understand her son's struggles. Hyun-woo's mother thought that Hyun-woo did not comprehend the purpose of the teacher's lessons. As she speculated, Hyun-woo did not participate or interact in a meaningful way with the teacher and peers to help him construct meanings, clear definition, usage, and genre of English-specific conventions. In several interviews, Hyun-woo said repeatedly (43 times).

*The teacher did not explain what similes, metaphors, brainstorming and descriptive writing are and just told us to write a descriptive writing. He did not explain how to write 'like' of 'as' in sentences. He did not give me enough information. I sat still and paid attention . . . But I did not know what [the words] meant like descriptive writing or brainstorming . .*

When I asked Hyun-woo if he could elaborate specifically what he believed prevented him from fully understanding the teacher's words he responded by explaining that:

*When the teacher uses difficult words like similes, metaphors, subordinating conjunctions, compound sentences, conclusions, brainstorming, descriptive writing, adjectives, adverbs, synonyms, antonyms ...each and every one of them has names. They are long and difficult to me so I don't understand these words and they are confusing to me. But I can understand if my friends give me specific directions like what to do and what not to do...like when they told me that descriptive writing is just telling facts not writing stories. My friend also told me what compound sentences are and showed me examples in my writing...Mrs. Han (referring to me) also gave me more information and told me exactly what the words like similes, metaphors, brainstorming, descriptive writing, or conclusion...when they tell me specific things, what they mean and how to use them in my sentences, then I understand it!*

Mr. Clark did not provide differentiated instructions that an ELL or a student of color needed. Hyun-woo's confusion with literacy terms and applying them in his writing appeared connected to the teacher's teaching approaches.

Regarding his peer interactions, Hyun-woo said that some of his peers were bossy and behaved like the teacher to him. For example, when students in Hyun-woo's group wrote simile sentences to describe a noun, "teacher," Hyun-woo's peers discussed, asked questions one another, laughed about each others' sentences, and wrote down their simile sentences for 10 minutes, five of his peers wrote almost full page of simile sentences. Hyun-woo worked alone looking up dictionaries and wrote three sentences. After peers shared their simile sentences in the group, one of the mainstream peers told Hyun-woo to share his sentences. Hyun-woo read, "My teacher was intergalactic and he was from another galaxy. He's sometimes cruel but, he says he's a dumb caveman." Laurie, then said, using an authoritative and firm voice, "Hyun-woo, we are writing similes. Those are just sentences." Hyun-woo quickly responded and came up with an excuse to Laurie's teacher-like evaluation by saying, "The teacher said I can, I asked." In this example, European-American student played an authority role (a teacher) and acted as a leader, while Hyun-woo behaved and responded as a passive student. As discussed in Yoon's (2007) article about mainstream classroom peers and ELLs relationships, this incident also demonstrates the mainstream peers' "hidden power" (p, 220) over Hyun-woo. Hyun-woo was isolated and silenced during most of the literacy events as illustrated throughout this paper.

Discipline problems Hyun-woo encountered from the middle to the rest of the semester, Hyun-woo would not answer my question how he felt about these problems. His mother did not know about all the discipline problems until we discussed during interviews. His mother took it harder than Hyun-woo when she found out that Hyun-woo was placed in a Dog-House, designated as a garbage collector for five days, and not allowed to go on a field trip. She told me in one of our informal conversations, "the teacher discriminated against my son!" She sobbed and told me again and again that she immigrated to this country to give him live-immersion English education and particularly chose this elite school to provide the best education to her son.

As illustrated in this case, Hyun-woo's classroom experience was not an inclusive part of the official classroom practices. Although Mr. Clark provided numerous social interactions during literacy activities, Hyun-woo was not in Mr. C's club, excluded from meaningful literacy interaction and thus, did not construct positive literacy learning results. A few of his friends were quite helpful while many of the mainstream peers laughed at his comments or questions in class. Some peers behaved as authority figures and exercised "hidden power" over him. Hyun-woo was a low profiled-with-ELL-status, quiet, and passive student of color in Mr. Clark's classroom.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The status characteristics theory analysis applied throughout this study was invaluable in making a coherent connection between the links of culture, race, and education. Specifically, the dominant society's racial intolerance toward other people's languages, cultures, and race were exhibited through the practices of the mainstream teachers and peers. As shown in this manuscript, the teacher believed that the established curriculum, including appropriate grade-level literacy concepts, grammar and usage, and their procedural structures reflected the acceptable

convention that all students should come prepared to address by the intermediate grades. A tremendous burden is placed on ELLs to adopt dominant cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), which can help bridge communication and cultural gaps. Instead, it should be a shared responsibility to accommodate both ways—the mainstream teacher and peers, as well as ELLs and students of color.

In this manuscript, I have shown that Mr. Clark provided a classroom that he understands to be appropriate and providing the best pedagogical practices for his school and its population. However, when an ELL was present in this predominantly European-American school and classroom, Mr. Clark did not know how to approach the student; he used his usual approaches which were mainly geared for the mainstream students. As shown in this manuscript, his teaching approaches worked well for many students, but not for an ELL. By documenting this particular story of a mainstream classroom teacher and a Korean student's classroom interactions, this manuscript does not intend to draw a direct causal link between the teacher's approach and the poor performance of this student. However, this study suggests that the classroom practices and social relationships do contribute to a student's social status, learning experiences, and partly to their task performance. As described in Yoon's (2007, 2008) articles, this study also attests the critical role the teacher plays in a student's academic and social life in the classroom. Along with Yoon (2007, 2008), Cummins (1994, 2001a), Compton-Lily (2007), Christian and Bloome (2004), and Triplett (2007), the authors recommend that teachers examine and reflect on how status and identity issues affect all students, especially ELLs and students of color.

The most critical person in the classroom, the teacher, is responsible for creating the classroom climate within the school community, and he or she also sets the tone for social interactions and relationships (Cummins, 2001a; Wells & Claxton, 2002). In this particular study, when the teacher did not assume his responsibility to accommodate the ELL, it can be argued that the classroom was a subtractive environment. That is, an environment where an ELL's primary language literacy skills and cultures were devalued in a forced assimilation with the mainstream culture (Lambert, 1974). In this way, the local classrooms mirrored the broader society's racism and xenophobia when dominant cultures intersect with non-dominant students in the classrooms and in the lives of the students and families (Compton-Lily, 2007; Dyson, 2003; Heath, 1983; McCarthey, 1997; Philips, 1983). Without the teacher's effort, ELLs cannot grasp concepts, such as "brainstorming, conjunctions, conclusions, and compound sentences, etc." because these are culturally loaded, cognitively, and academically demanding concepts (Cummins, 1994; 2001b). Furthermore, ELLs can be the targets of some peers' ridicule, which are attributed to the ELL's lower status in this case. As a result of the teacher's insensitivity, ELLs have become academic and social problems in the classroom and, in many other cases, have become overrepresented in special education programs (Cummins, 1994).

Significant to the literacy field, this study extends our understanding of the intersections of the ELL status, ethnicity, race, and education in the classroom, thereby helping to fill the gap in research by telling stories of "the silenced" and balancing "the dominant master script."

However, there are affordances and constraints associated with this study. This study's researcher is from the same background as the participant. First, because I am from the same Korean culture, I was able to spot differences and also was able to gain an insider's insight by sharing my experiences as an immigrant and student in the U.S. with my Hyun-woo and his family. At the same time, however, these affordances could have served as constraints in that I sympathized with their frustration. Therefore, I may not have understood the teacher's concerns with his daily duties and demands from parents, administration, and an accountability-oriented district policy.

Considering the fact that by the year 2050, students of color will become half of the total student population in our public schools (Ball, 2000; Jayakumar, 2009; Umbach, 2006), teachers have only one simple decision to make. They need to arm themselves with a multicultural competence that enables them to embrace a common goal of education through appropriate pedagogy and sociocultural knowledge of others (Triplett, 2007) and integrate diversity into their classrooms. As Delgado and Stefancic (2000) noted, "By writing and speaking against unfair and one-sided reality, we may hope to contribute to a better, fairer world" (p. xvii), and this story of "the silenced,"—a Korean student's struggle in the mainstream classroom may be a catalyst that will begin to enlighten one reader; proceeding one educator at a time, in order for all educators to cope with a global, social, and demographic change in schools, that is to come.

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